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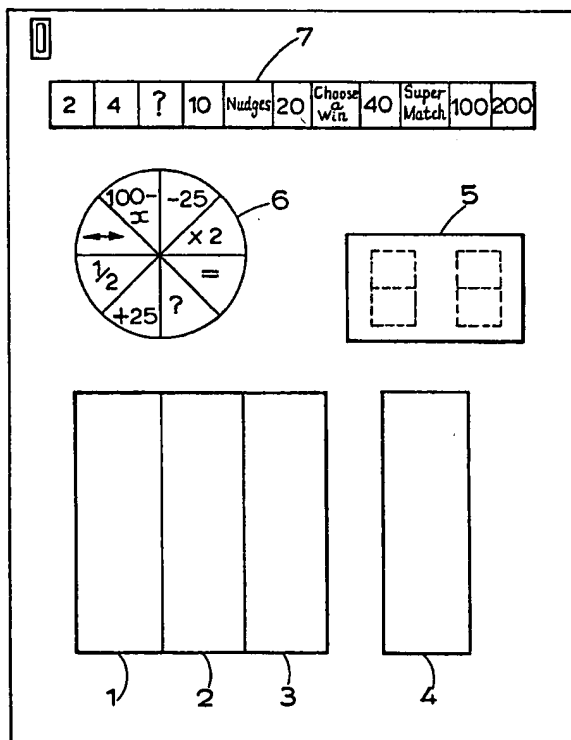
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(54) Gaming and amusement machines

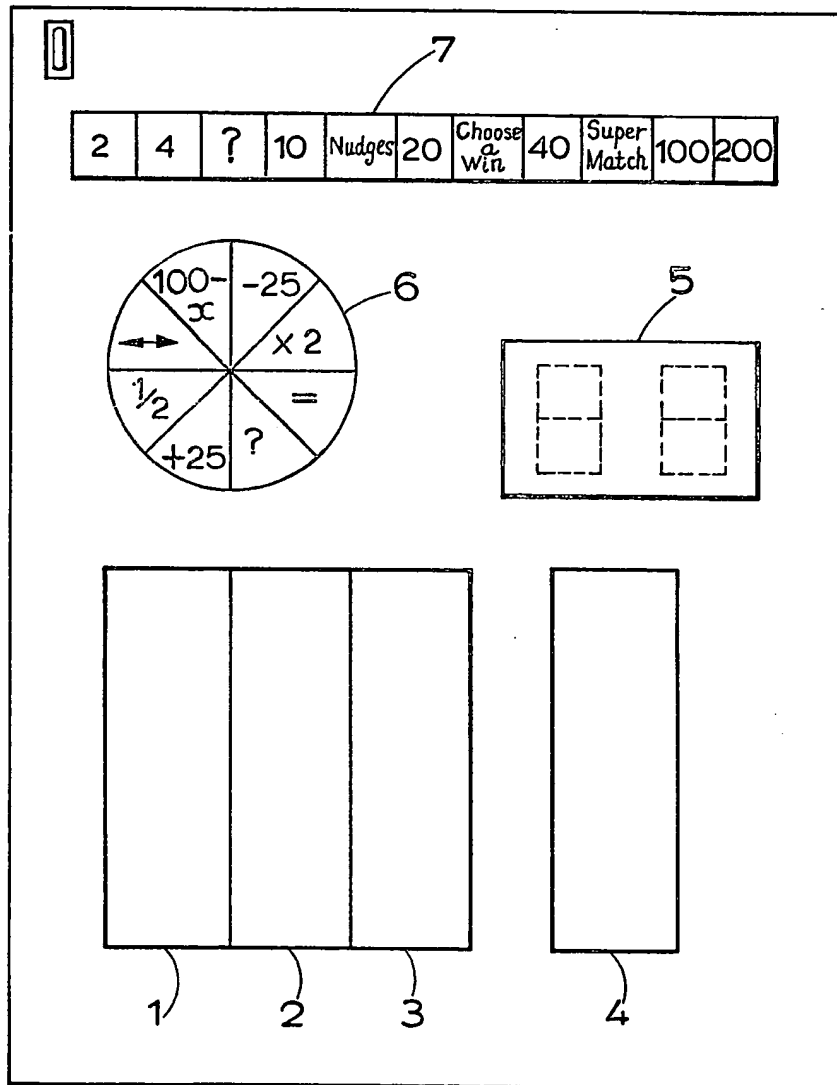
(57) In a fruit machine having three normal reels (1, 2 and 3) and a fourth reel (4) which carries numbered symbols, a special awards feature is controlled by a number count displayed on a two-digit counter (5) and which is incremented progressively every time a game is played. During the special awards feature the player is given an opportunity to spin the fourth reel (4) and each time he does so he advances one step along an award trail (7) towards a jackpot. However, the number count (5) is decremented by the figure on the fourth reel (4) which comes to a halt on the win line after each spin on the fourth reel (4) and the special awards feature is lost when the number count (5) falls below zero. The number count may also be influenced on occasions by other factors such as by arithmetical operations on a feature wheel display (6), the particular operation being determined at random or under the control of the player.



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SPECIFICATION

Gaming and amusement machines

5 This invention relates to coin-released or
token-released gaming or amusement-with-
prizes machines of the kind generally known
as fruit machines, in which a number of reels,
usually three or four, carrying symbols on their
10 peripheries, are sent in rotation after insertion
of a coin or token and when they come to a
halt if the symbols on the reels in a certain
position, the so-called win line, make up one
of a number of predetermined combinations a
15 prize is awarded, e.g. in the form of cash,
tokens, credits, or further games. Instead of
actual reels, their equivalent may be used, e.g.
discs, or representations of symbols projected
optically or in the form of images on a video
20 screen. Such gaming or amusement-with-
prizes machines will hereinafter be referred to
as of the kind set forth.

In addition to prizes awarded on the result
of the initial game there are also numerous
25 features offered, often at random, following a
non-winning game, e.g. so-called ladders,
trails, and other opportunities to gain bigger
prizes; it is also possible, following a winning
game, to gamble the prize already won.
30 The aim of the invention is to provide a
novel form of game of this general kind but
having new features which are particularly at-
tractive to the player. According to the inven-
tion, in a gaming or amusement-with-prizes
35 machine of the kind set forth a special awards
feature is controlled by a number count which
is incremented or decremented progressively
and/or at random and decremented or incre-
mented by the amount of a figure which re-
40 sults from the spinning of a further reel, the
opportunity to spin this further reel being
awarded following a non-winning game and
giving the chance of progress along the
awards feature, for instance along an awards
45 'ladder' or 'trail' leading to a jackpot, but in
the event of the number going beyond a pre-
determined minimum or maximum the feature
is lost.

Preferably, the further reel carries symbols
50 representing numbers, the number count is in-
cremented when normal games are played and
decremented by the number represented by
the symbol on the further reel which comes to
a halt on the win line after each spin of the
55 further reel, the feature being lost when the
number count falls below a predetermined
minimum, conveniently zero.

Thus, when the player is given the opportu-
nity to spin the further reel (usually a fourth
60 reel), he wants to make use of it as many
times as he can, because each time he spins
it he is advanced further along the ladder or
trail towards the jackpot, but at the same time
every spin results in a number which de-
65 creases the number count and increases the

risk of that count going below zero and losing
him the feature altogether.

It will be understood that arithmetically the
above-described system could, within the
70 scope of the principle behind the invention, be
inverted, in that the number on the counter
could be decremented progressively or at ran-
dom, and the numbers that appear on the
fourth reel are added to it rather than sub-
75 tracted, and in that case the feature is lost
when the number goes beyond a predeter-
mined maximum.

It is believed that this principle of using a
counter, on which the number is incremented
80 and decremented by other factors, to control
a feature, the feature being lost when the
number oversteps a certain limit, is broadly
new.

In one preferred example the number is a
85 two-digit one, i.e. runs from zero to 99, and
is prominently displayed on a counter. The
number count may be increased or decreased
progressively by a given number, such as one,
every time a game is played. Alternatively or
90 additionally the number count may be altered
on certain occasions in accordance with one
of a number of arithmetical operations deter-
mined either at random or under the control
of the player in an additional feature.

The present invention will now be de-
scribed, by way of example only, with refer-
ence to the accompanying drawing. The draw-
ing shows a fruit machine having three reels
1, 2 and 3 which carry fruit symbols, a fourth
100 reel 4, a two-digit counter 5, a feature wheel
display 6 and an award trail 7.

During play on the fruit machine ordinary
games may be played either on the first three
reels 1, 2 and 3 or, when the fourth reel 4
105 carries fruit symbols, on all four reels. Regard-
less of whether or not the fourth reel 4 takes
part in an ordinary game it carries numbered
symbols, for instance figures superimposed on
fruit symbols or figures by themselves.

The two-digit counter 5 may, for instance,
comprise a numeric liquid crystal display which
can display any number between zero and 99.
Every time a game is played on the machine
the number displayed on the counter 5 is pro-
115 gressively increased by one up to a maximum
of 99. The number displayed on the counter 5
may also be influenced at random by other
factors. For example, in one typical case, ev-
ery time a cherry symbol lands on the win line
120 in an ordinary game it is arranged to reverse
the digits displayed on the counter (e.g. if the
number displayed was 19, it becomes 91). It
will be apparent that the possibilities on these
lines are endless.

Another such possibility involves the feature
wheel display 6 on the display panel. A ring
of boxes containing instructions for different
arithmetical operations to be performed on the
number on the counter is made available on
130 certain occasions and the different boxes flash

at random. When the flashing stops the instruction in that box is performed. The instructions may, for example, be to double the number on the counter or to halve it, to subtract it from 100, to reverse its digits, or to add or subtract a certain fixed amount. The player may be given some degree of control over the wheel feature, by having a stop button by which he can try to bring the flashing to stop on the particular arithmetical instruction that suits his purpose.

This wheel feature may be made available at random following a non-winning game, or when a special symbol on one of the normal reels 1, 2 and 3 comes to a halt on the win line.

When the special awards feature of the invention becomes available, for example randomly at the end of a non-winning game or on completion of a 'fruit ladder' or 'numbers trail', the player is given an opportunity to spin the fourth reel 4 on its own for as many times as he likes with the aim of advancing as far as possible along the award trail 7 without losing the feature. The award trail 7 may be of a known kind and in the example shown in the drawing it has eleven steps with prize awards increasing from a small award at one end to a jackpot at the other end. The prize awards may be cash awards, tokens, credits or feature awards leading to further prizes, for instance 'nudges' or 'choose-a-win' features.

During the special feature, each time the player spins the fourth reel 4 he advances one step along the award trail 7 to an increased award. However every time the reel 4 is spun, the figure appearing on the win line when it comes to a halt is deducted from the figure appearing on the counter and as soon as that figure goes below a predetermined minimum, zero, the feature is lost altogether and the player either loses everything or is awarded a minimum consolation award such as two credits.

Thus when the player is playing the special feature he must decide either to collect the award he has reached on the award trail 7 or to spin the fourth reel 4 another time in the hope of advancing along the award trail 7 but with a risk of losing the feature and the award already gained. The special feature therefore increases the attractiveness of the machine to a player.

It will be understood that during the special feature other symbols on the fourth reel 4 apart from numbers may also be used to manipulate the figure on the counter to the advantage or disadvantage of the player. For instance, the wheel feature described above may come into operation during the special feature when a special symbol on the fourth reel 4 comes to a halt on the win line. All the time during the special feature, the player is endeavouring to advance along the trail to reach a jackpot but the more use he makes of

the fourth reel spins to do this the more he risks pushing the value of the number displayed beyond the limit at which he loses everything (the limit being zero in the example described).

CLAIMS

1. A coin-released or token-released gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth in which a special awards feature is controlled by a number count which is incremented or decremented progressively and/or at random and decremented or incremented by the amount of a figure which results from the spinning of a further reel, the opportunity to spin the further reel being awarded following a non-winning game and giving the chance of progress along the awards feature, but in the event of the number going beyond a predetermined minimum or maximum the feature is lost.

2. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in claim 1 in which the further reel carries symbols representing numbers, the number count is incremented when normal games are played and decremented by the number represented by the symbol on the further reel which comes to a halt on the win line after each spin of the further reel, the feature being lost when the number count falls below a predetermined minimum.

3. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in claim 2 in which the predetermined minimum is zero.

4. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in any of the preceding claims in which the number count is displayed on a two-digit counter.

5. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in any of the preceding claims in which the number count is increased or decreased progressively by a given number every time a game is played.

6. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in any of the preceding claims including an additional feature by means of which the number count is altered on certain occasions in accordance with one of a number of arithmetical operations determined either at random or at least partly under the control of the player.

7. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in claim 6 in which the additional feature is made available at random following a non-winning game.

8. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in claim 6 in which the additional feature is made available when a special symbol on one of the normal reels or on the further reel comes to a halt on the win line.

9. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine as claimed in any of the preceding claims in which after each spin of the further reel during the special awards feature, the player advances along an award ladder or trail

leading to a jackpot, provided that the number has not gone beyond the predetermined minimum or maximum.

10. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes
5 machine substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying drawing.

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